If you do not become like the children

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- physiotherapist, clown and mime, theologian and priest
- I live in Halberstadt, in Saxony-Anhalt
- Pedagogical-theological institute (PTI) for further education in Drübeck (Harz) run by the Protestant Church of Central Germany
- Qualifications of teachers at church-run kindergartens

Kindergarten in Saxony-Anhalt

- 98% of the children at the age of three
- 57% of the children below th age of three
- 70 % spend seven hours per day in the kindergarten
- GDR= 0, 2 % Christian Kindergartens
- Now = 10% Christian Kindergartens

Saxony-Anhalt

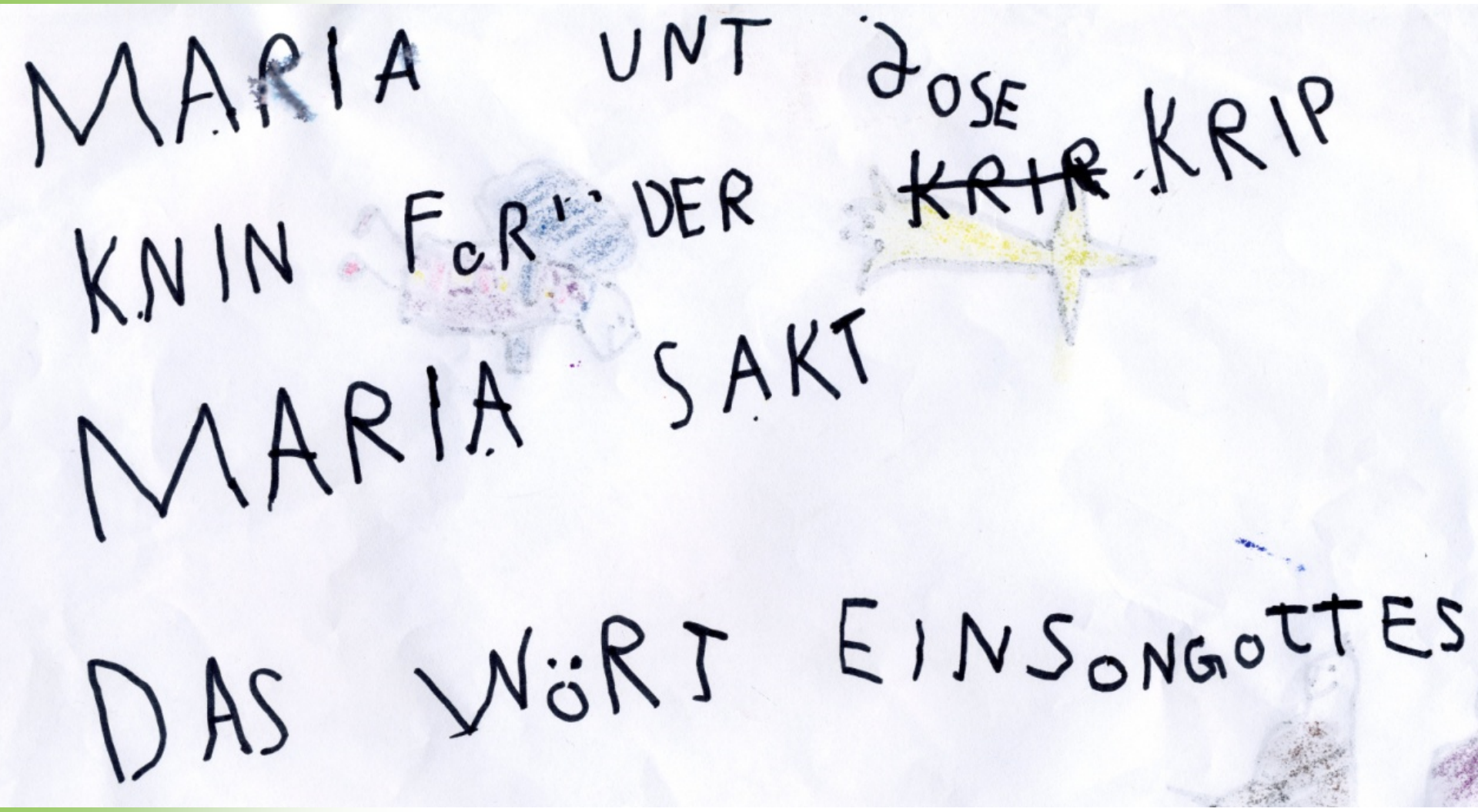
- 80% of the population of Saxony-Anhalt is undenominational
- 2% of the inhabitants have a background of migration
- 40% agree with statements against foreigners

How to meet a christ in East Germany?

- Christian Kindergartens like a bridge between the church and the secularized world

christian denomination as a cultural foundation

- also in secularized East Germany Christian celebrations structure the year
- in nearly every village you find a church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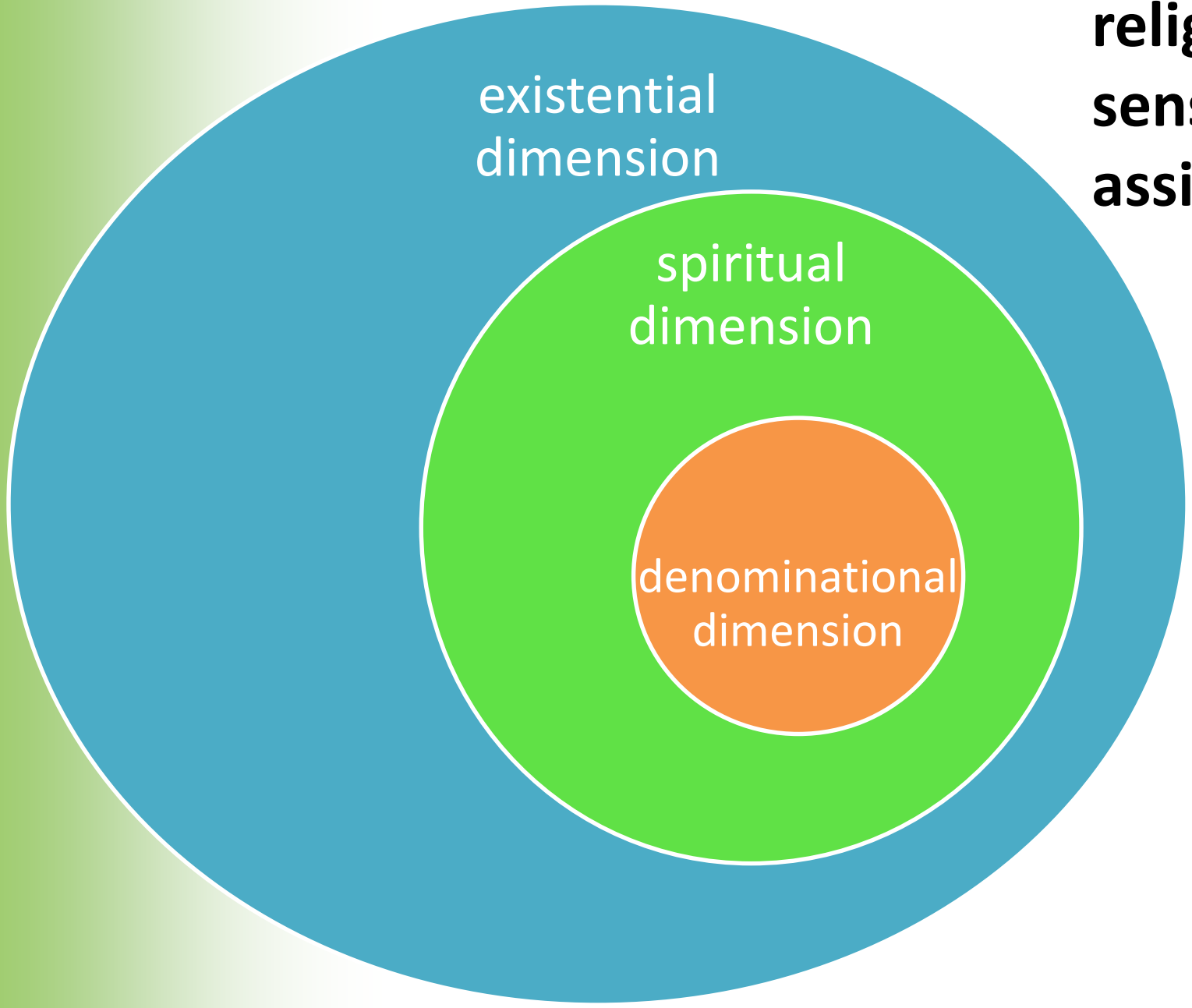
concept of religious education

- religiously sensitive assistance is not considered as a determined denominational transmission of faith

religiously sensitive assistance

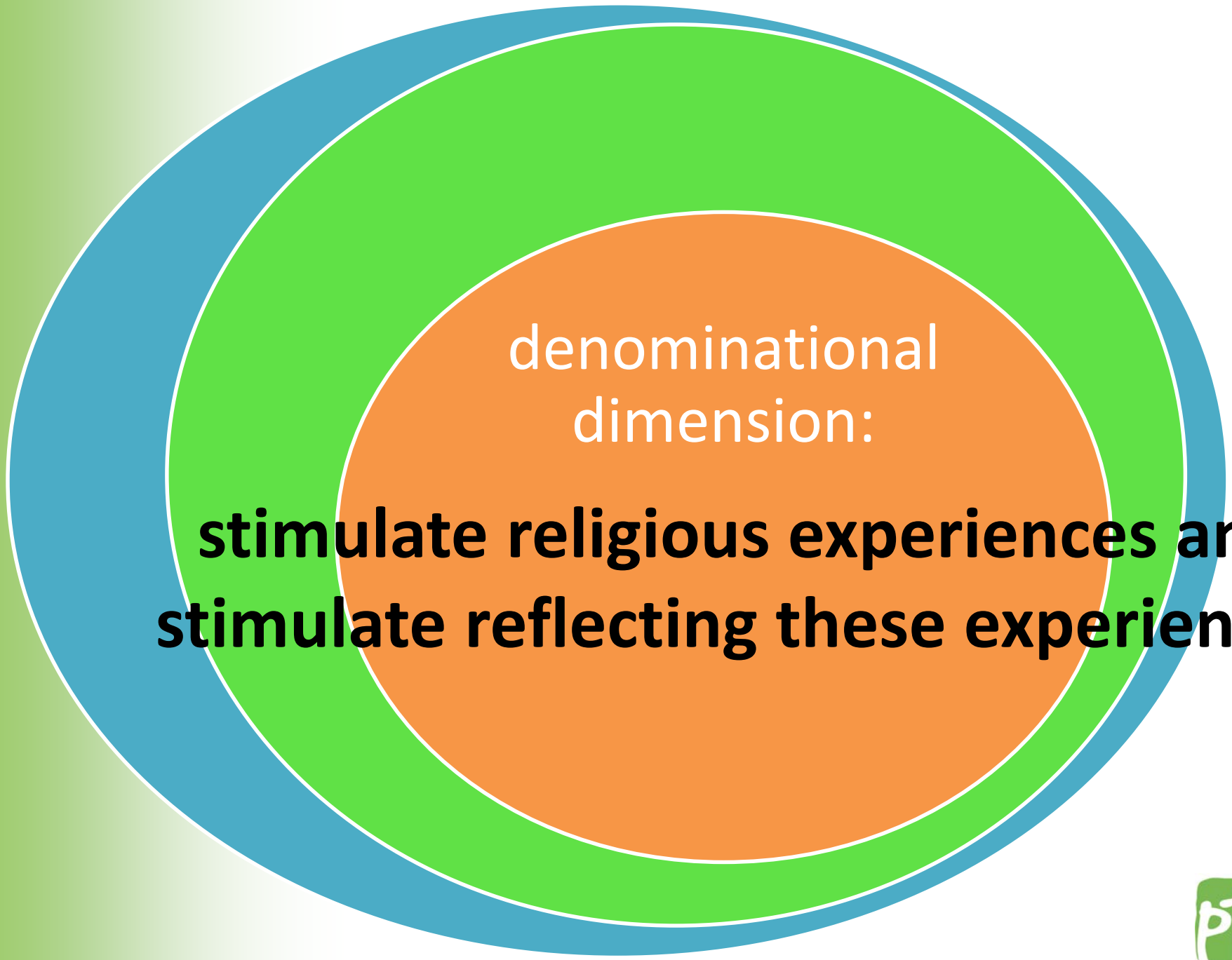


existential dimension:

listening to the children, offering a trustful relationship to the children

spiritual
dimension

stimulate spiritual experiences in the everyday life
and
stimulate reflecting these experiences

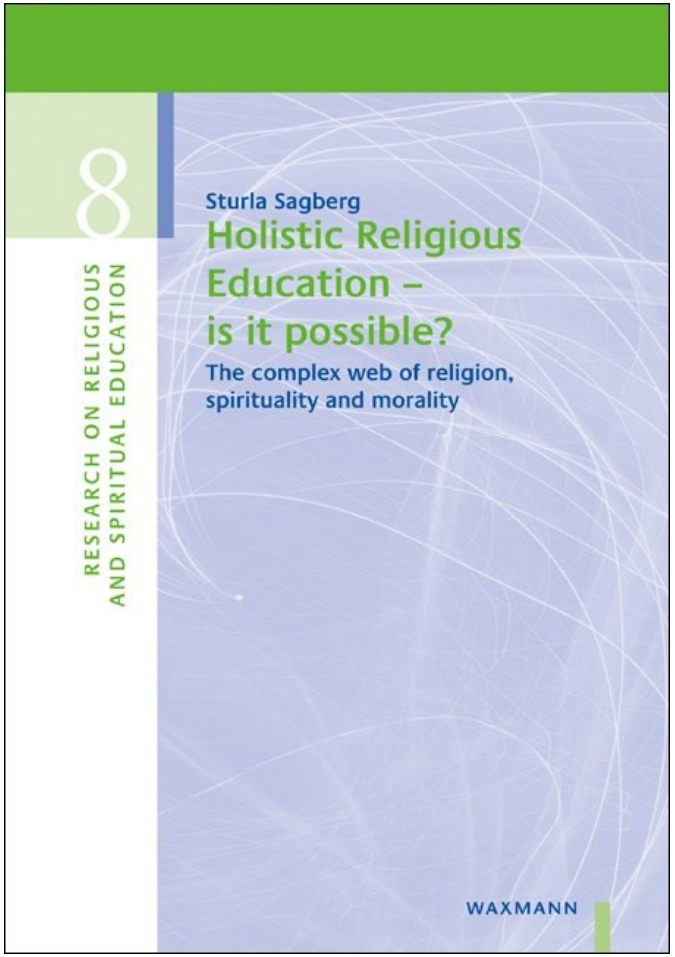

denominational dimension:
stimulate religious experiences and
stimulate reflecting these experience

child theology

- theology as the appeal from God to the creation
- every kind of reflection about God and religious questions is theology
- child -theology is a lay -theology in the context of childhood
- child-theology is accepting the childrens views on theological themes

child theology and children rights

"Are children needed in church? I am not thinking only of tasks to be done on Sundays, but of the role of the child in a church fellowship. (…) Do they get recognition as real contributors?" (Sturla Sagberg, 2015)



theology "for the child"
theology "by the child"
theology "with the child"

theology by the child

- children learn actively from the beginning of their life
- they learn by playing and do it in their own personal way
- they construct and reconstruct an image of the world
- Thinking during early childhood can be described as a „provisional standpoint“

Laura, 18 months old

- Laura sees a fly. „What's that?“
- Mother: „That is a fly.“
- L: „Fly!“
- Laura notices a bird : „Fly.“
- The mother is correcting: „No. That is a bird.“
- L: „Bird.“
- Laura discovers a dead fly: „This? Fly.“
- The mother answers: „That is a dead fly.“
- Laura runs to her room and shows a toy-bird.
- L: „This? A dead bird?“

theology by the child

- begins when children go beyond the objective level and ask questions that are meaningful and do not have only one right answer
- often this begins to happen around the age of four

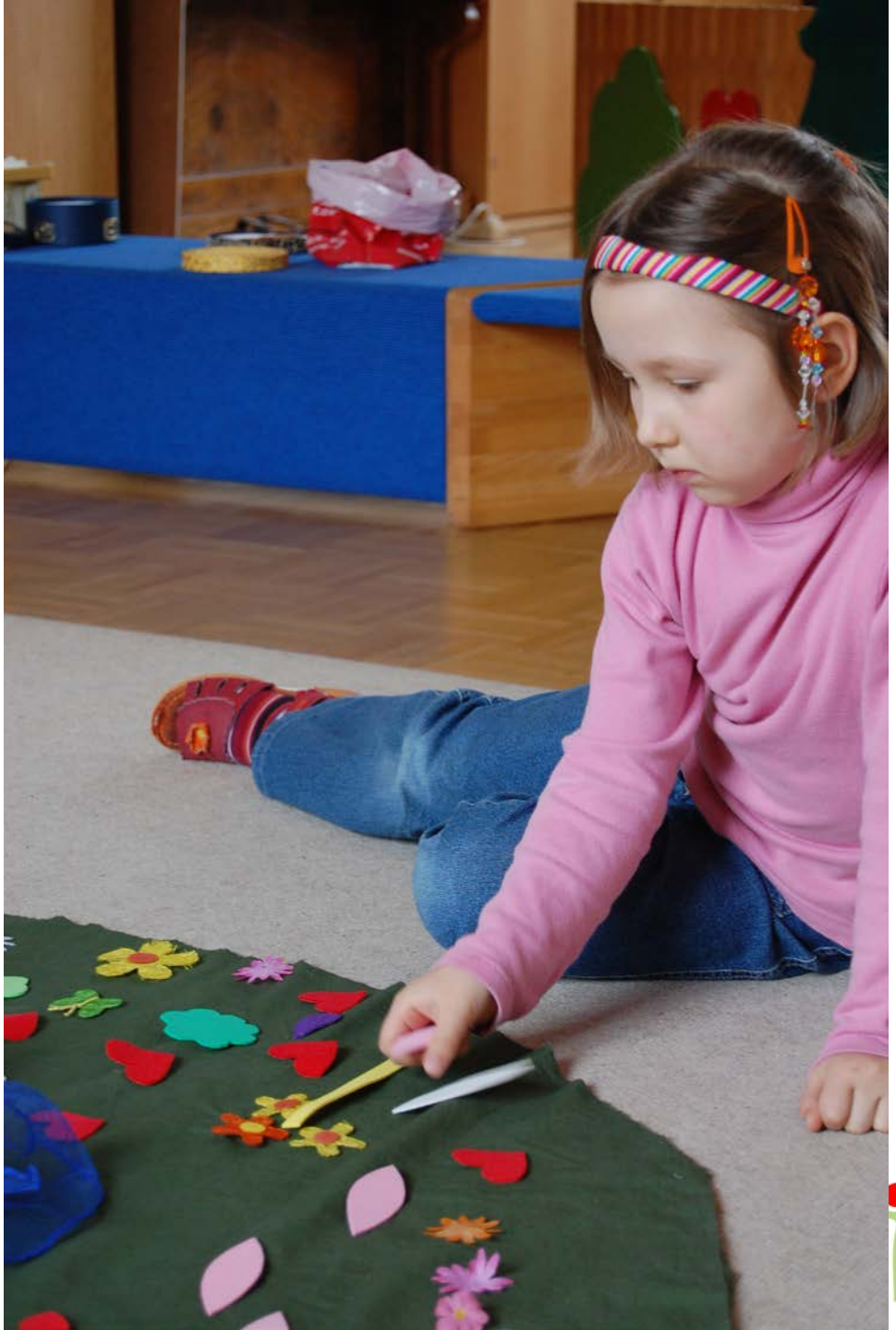
conversation in a group of for- and five-year-olds

- Eva: Have the people who died become angels?
- Teacher (T): You need not ask me, ask the other children.
- Leni: The people have become stars.
- Sina: What?
- Lenard: Oh no, people have not become stars!
- Max: No!
- T: Eva has asked the question whether people who die have become angels. Leni says that people who die have become stars and Lenard and Max say that hey have not become stars.

- Max: They got burned. The body. Only ash remains in the grave.
- T: Yes, that is right. That is what happens with certain people.
- Max: That happened with my grandfather.
- Jana: And this is an urn.
- T: Some people are put into a coffin and others are burnt and the ash gets put into an urn.
- Simon: But the soul cannot die and goes to heaven.
- T: Oh. Could the soul be what Leni means, that which becomes a star, or that which Eva means , that it becomes an angel?
- Children all together: Yes. No. Perhaps.....

Often the conversations develop spontaneously:

- in the morning circle,
- during the meal,
- while playing games,
- when they get dressed,
- or before sleep.



Tanja (4): God is not a wardrobe, right? And he is not a house.

Mother: That's right, he is neither wardrobe nor house.

T: But he is in everything that is real.

M: You are right about that – He is in everything that is alive.

T: God is God. God is not a drawer. God is a creature. God is like a big invisible light, that's always with us. And if our parents get lost, God protects us. But he protects us anyway. Is God bigger than the sun? M: What do you think?

T: He is. And god identified Mary to bear his son. And the thing with the crucifix and his death, he did that because he wanted his son to be with him again. And the Holy Ghost are God and Jesus's thoughts.

Ist der Tod ewehwig?

Und wenn nicht, was passiert nach dem Tod?

Wie viele Jahrtasendte wird es noch geben?

Wesshalb echsestiere ich überhaupt?

Warum bin ich eigentlich ich?

Warum, entstand das eigentlich alles: Gott, de Welt und alles was die Weld umgibt?

Jasmin,
7 Jahre alt

theology with the child: general pedagogical basics

Child Theology as a „theology with children“ can further the democratization, the participation of the children and the experience of pluralism – in the families, the church, the society.

Theologizing confirms the child in finding personal answers concerning their own religious questions and also to perceive different kinds of answers.

theology with the child

- multidimensional notion of reflection that includes a dimension of all senses

- perceiving, acting and expressing creatively are as important as a dialogue

- Gina: Sometimes he comes down and rings and then I cuddle with him and play with him.
- T: With whom?
- Gina: With God, and his child. Jesus.
- T: You can play with them?
- Gina: With both.
- T: Ok.
- Gina: And then they often come to see me.
- T: They often come to see you? What do they play with you?
- Gina: always in my dolls' kitchen.
- T: In your dolls' kitchen. An do you like it? Gina: Yes.

- Young children tend to communicate in more wholistic ways and relate more to their body than older children.

- Ina: How do the people know that Jesus lives and God?
- Emil: Because they are always in Heaven.
- Chris starts looking intensely up.
- Bernd: With God, above.
- Hannes also starts looking up. Chris continues looking up and starts singing a silent monotonous chanting.
- Jona: We cannot see ourselves.
- Bernd (with closes eyes): In our dream. In our dream we can see God and Jesus.
- Anton: Exactly.
- Ina: Yes

theology between children

- As a special feature for theologizing we can underline the importance of theologizing <u>between</u> children.

- Anna (3) is sitting on a hill outside and is digging a hole like mad.
- Children (and a teacher) arrive and ask what she is doing.
- Anna: “I am digging a very deep hole down to God.”
- Max (5): “God is not in the earth. He is in heaven, in the earth is hell.”
- Anna: No, he is in the earth, he has the whole world in his hand.
- The children start discussing. Other children join in the conversation.

- Chris (3): Chris is sitting on the floor, playing a sticking game. He is putting some colourd stickers into the base and says: „ That is a church that God was born in.“
- After a short pause he continues to stick other stickers and adds: „Here is one more church. Here another God is being born.“
- Bernd (4): „There is only one God.“
- Chris: „No“.
- Bernd: „At your age.... at my age there is only one God.“

theology with the child

- does not go along with an intentional purpose.
- the process not the result is the aim
- the most important aim is described by her as „enabling the children to discover answers themselves”

theologizing with children

- one of the tasks of child theology is to talk about the pluralism of realities and the different levels of truth
- one special aim is, that children “are able to deal with the biblical tradition and theological thinking
- this requires that children do not only consider the bible as a factual report but that they discover other interpretations

- T: Why does Mary see Jesus after he has died and put into a grave?
- Josie: You feel him with your heart and you cannot see him.
- Luisa: Yes, in your heart, a strange feeling. Even when I think of Jesus, I hear sad music which I really have.
- Janek: When he was in Heaven, you cannot see him, but notice him.
- Djamal: Yes, but having the voices kept in your heart surely makes you happy.

theology **for** the child

- supports a religious education that is suitable for a child and not dogmatic

Mascha (4): Papa? Grandma is old,
she still believes in God.
Of course, we no longer believe in God.
Papa, Does God know that we do not believe in him?

In the tv-news says a muslim: Allah is the only real God. Johanna (7 years old) react: You can not know that. Nobody knows what God is like. Maybe there are many Gods? We only know that because our parents told us. We do not know everything and neither do they. We can only believe what we got from our parents.

Does God exist?

- How we can speak appropriate about God?
- The bible has not only one theological conception about God.
- The Bible is using symbols and pictures as parables for God.

God-case – theology for and with the child

- Diversity of symbols shows the diversity of God.
- One symbol has several meanings.
- Symbols are supposed to invite to play with them.

- Children are 5 – 6 years old
- 2 children are growing up in a Christian family

Summary

- children discovered many very diverse ideas of God,
- the social field influences the children sometimes more and sometimes less,
- by sharing with other children they are encouraged to reflect on their hypothesis,
- some children are open to changing their theory, but others not
- children often live with misunderstandings because of a lack of opportunities to speak about their ideas
- children can be confused by such a talk, untouched, confirmed, encouraged to appropriate or can be stimulated to a reflected positioning with a consciousness of certainty

Thank you for your attention